

BARABBAS

by

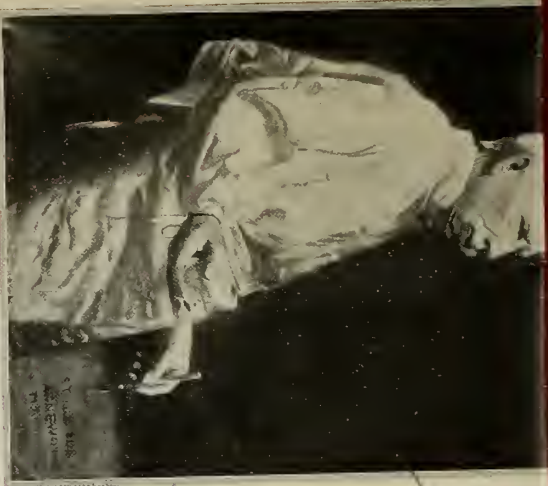
S. Weir Mitchell

Book News Monthly, April, 1914

HV 2345 M



AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.



Study for Agnew Clinic
By Thomas Eakins

more representative.

With regard to the constructive side of the collection, it seems that, among the painters and sculptors of the first rank who used to send three or four pieces every year, but few continue to exhibit, and these are meagerly represented.

Our principal interest, therefore, attaches itself to the younger men and women who have already "arrived," but are still progressive in their work. They seem to possess more vitality and to absorb more readily the marvelous freedom of expression and achievement which marks the spirit of this time.

The artist or sculptor is no longer believed to be an impractical dreamer, even by the more ignorant of our countrymen, but he is seen as an alert, up-to-date workman, who expresses his sturdy Americanism in his Art, instead of in engineering, insurance, or other lines of business. He really has a greater task before him along the line of education than the rest of them, because he must first teach the masses to see beautiful things, and then show them their economic value. Art is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity.

The large Southwest gallery was better hung this year than usual, there being but one line of pictures, and an improved system of electric lighting.

Last year the lack of large or important canvases for the center walls made this room very uninteresting in its arrangement, but this year it was not so.

In the center of the end wall was placed a large canvas by Gari Melchers entitled "Maternity", a nicely arranged subject painted in his characteristic manner, with his well-known penchant for brilliant flowered materials. This picture, however, would have proved even more successful had the back-

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Barabbas

A Dramatic Poem

By S. Weir Mitchell

Tents in the hills north of Bethlehem. Evening, near to dusk.

An aged Hebrew standing before a tent chants.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: Amplias, Jacob, Barabbas, David.

Yacob. When He opens the gates of the morning,
Bow lowly to pray.
When He closes the gates of the evening,
Thank Him for thy day.
Enter His courts with thanksgiving,
Enter with praise;
The gates of His mercy are open
All gracious His ways.

(He ceases and watches a lad, who comes quickly.)

Yacob. Why are you here? I trust the flocks are safe.

David. The shepherd guards them and they cannot stray.
I saw two strangers coming; one seemed blind.
I thought them lost, but he who could not see
Said to the other, "Come, some tents are near,
We shall find friends." But then the other said,
"Or quite as likely Arab plunderers."
Then I thought fit to say, "A welcome waits;
My father's tents lie yonder. Follow me."
The young man answered, "We must trust your
words.

This blind man found me wandering and starved;
He gave me food and water, saying, 'Come!'
I followed him in wonder and in doubt."
The blind man, father, did not wait or speak,
And I ran by in haste to tell of them.

Yacob. It may be, son, he is not really blind;
A beggar's fraud, perhaps. What matters it!
Go quickly, son, and fetch the bread and salt.

(He greets the two men as they draw near. The blind man touches head, heart and lips, as he bends, remaining silent. His companion touches his forehead and bows. The host returns the Oriental salutation of the blind man.)

Yacob. Take of my bread and salt; my tents are yours.
(They accept.)
The peace of God which passeth other peace
Be with you ever.

Barabbas. May your days be long,
Long in the land that once was ours alone.

Meanwhile Amplias, the younger man, who has been uneasily watchful, murmurs to himself.

Note.—This poem was found among the unpublished manuscripts of Dr. Mitchell at the time of his death. It now appears for the first time.

Amplias. Ah! Hebrews both, and surely to be trusted,
(Aloud) May the great God of Chance be good to you,
And, fortune favored, may you live as long
As you are happy and all gods are kind—
Your gods and mine. What better can I wish?

Yacob *(To David)* Enter and share with us our evening meal.
Fetch me cool water from the jar; their feet
May well be heat sore from the desert sands.
(To Amplias) Our people hereabout say David's spring
More than another has refreshing power.

Amplias *(At ease)* I passed the spring at sunset days ago,
And paused to watch the tall, lithe maidens come
With balanced water jars upon their heads
And hand on hip, a merry company.
More black than midnight was their wind-blown
hair;
I lingered, jealous of the golden light
That turned to bronze its darkness. I could spin
Gay verses on them to make envious
The fair-haired beauties of Athenian homes.

The blind man sits silent.

Yacob *(pleased and laughing)* Oft have I watched when in my younger days.
Their mothers came as now the daughters come;
I used to hear their gladsome chorus swell,
"Give us such lovers as came to the well,
Benaiah, Abishai, and Asahel."

Amplias. I caught gay fragments of some broken song,
My servants said was of the man you name,
This David, once a poet and a king.

Yacob. Enter my tent. When you have cooled your feet,
Eaten and rested, you may hear the tale
Told as a brave man told it of himself.

Barabbas. An ancient story of the poet king
When we were not the cringing slaves of Rome.
They lie at rest on the tent rugs while the lad bathes their feet and their hunger is satisfied.

Amplias. My thanks, good lad. What is it you are called?

David. David.

Amplias. Indeed, a namesake of the king!

He lies at ease, with hands clasped behind his head.

(To Yacob) You should know more of us—of me, at least.
Hunger and thirst are foes to courtesy!

- Yacob.* We ask no name but guest of those to whom
We gladly give what God to us has given,
Who are His guests.
- Amplias.* A gracious comment, yet
I claim the pleasant liberty to learn
Who is this gentle almoner of the gods.
- Yacob.* My name is Yacob, and the lad, my son.
We, as you see, are merely shepherd folk,
Well pleased when some one from the busy world
Brings news a six months old, or haply takes
A sheep or two for taxes, and we hear
What Cæsar rules.
- Amplias.* Your name will live with me,
A welcome guest of oft reminding hours.
My name is Amplias, a Greek by birth,
Rich when at home, but now a stranded man
With what of life disastrous fortune left
When robber Arabs fell on me and took
My slaves, my beasts, and left me little else.
This blind man's kindness led me safely here.
What instinct guides me? When I questioned him,
Grateful and curious, he made brief replies
And said no needless word from morn to eve,
When talk or jest had eased a weary day.
- Yacob*
(laughing) Talk if you will. We are not quite unlearned,
And talk with one who knows the outer world
Is always welcome to a lonely man.
- Amplias.* I have seen men and cities, wrangled too
With mad philosophers or played with verse,
And won with wit the rose crown of the feast;
Have wandered far, and now that I am fed
Am what I was not these three talk-starved days.
I doubt if empty nightingales could sing!
First for the song, and then, perhaps, the friend
Who led me hither will confess the charm
Shared with the swallow on his airy flight.
- Barabbas has meanwhile been a silent listener. The
lad sitting near him feels now the touch of the blind man
as he speaks.*
- Barabbas.* You have lived half your life the weathercock
Of every wind that blows—of every breeze.
- Amplias.* Now there, at last, our friend has something said,
A weathercock's a rather useful thing—
A tireless sentinel, and much in use
To point sage morals for the young, when age
Has set sad limits to men's naughtiness
And left one Luxury, the power to scold.
- Yacob.*
(pleasantly) A restless symbol of the joy of change
You Greeks so dearly love. Now then, blind friend,
Your answer to our merry weathercock.
- Barabbas.*
(to Yacob) He shall be answered when my hour has come.
I am called Barabbās,—once you knew me well.
- Yacob.*
(smiles) The storms of life, I fear, have wrecked for me
Too many memories of younger days,
And after all the name is not the man.
- Barabbas.* You were the Rabbi Yacob. Once we met—
Not since that day have I seen face of man.
- Amplias.* That seems to hint a story. May I ask—
- Barabbas.* Ask—you may ask in vain; what matters it!
- Amplias.* I pray you, pardon me; but really now
The talk goes back to something worth one's while,
- Grows eloquent of opportunity,
And we may talk until the cool of night
Leaves silver moons upon the dewy grass.
That's worth remembrance for a fertile hour.
(Writes on his tablets.)
- Yacob.* Thanks for a pleasant thought. Sing now, my son,
And keep some memory of those silver moons
We used to call the Arab spider-tents.
Forget us all, and be the poet king.
The boy rises proudly and chants.
- David* This is a psalm of remembrance
A song to be sung
Of three friends who loved me
When I was still young.
Dry-lipped from the desert
I slumbered, accurst
With dreams of far waters
That mocked at my thirst.
I stood, a boy shepherd,
Where guarding the brink,
The maidens asked coyly,
A song for a drink;
Or naked and heated
I lay where below
The sun gift from Lebanon
Cumbled to snow,
Till gaily, dream happy,
I raced through the shade
Where far-braided silver
Of rivulets strayed.
What joy for the kiss of
The virginal pool,
Whose chaste water clasped me
Delicious and cool,
Where the white lilies rocked
In the sun-cradled light.
When waking, and thirsting,
I moaned in the night,
And cried, with lost manhood,
"Who is there will bring
Where Philistines guard it,
A draft from the spring?"
At morning I saw them—
Men bleeding, and dumb
Till Asahel murmured,
"My lord, we are come.
We smote in the mid-watch
The Philistine band;
We smote till the sword hilt
Was locked to the hand.
The vultures are stooping
To find at the sping
The dead who once guarded
The water we bring—
The water you asked for."
They gave to my fear
The skin bag men carry
When battle is near.
Ah, me, the mad longing!
"Far be it, oh Lord!"
On the sand of the desert
The water I poured:
"To the God of our fathers
I give what you gave;
I drink not, my brothers,
The blood of the brave!"
- Amplias.* That voice in Rome, my lad, would bring you gold.
- Barabbas.* Does it bring nothing but a thought of gold?

Amplias. Nothing? Indeed! It opens golden mines
(gaily) Of thought, conjecture, questions numberless.
The water wasted on the desert sand
Was such libation as at feasts we pour
To Bacchus, master of the festal hour.

Barabbas. He gave from need, and you of base excess.

Amplias. No single motive ever rules a man.
(pleasantly) The custom may be old, and vanity
Has many forms, as thus—

David I hate the man.
(aside to *Yacob*)

Amplias. What says the lad?

Yacob. Now answer him, my son,
Say what you will. Speak out your honest thought.

David. I'm very sorry that I sang for you;
You would have drunk the water. You, our guest,
Insult the memory of our hero king.

Amplias. No man can say what such an hour may bring;
Decisions vary with the weather's change.

Barabbas. Bird-witted ever, these light-minded Greeks!

Amplias. Another hour of thirst might—I suppose
Those men drank deeply at the conquered spring?

David. They did not drink.
(angrily)

Amplias. And wherefore not, my lad?

David. I do not know; they went and came athirst.

Yacob. The lad would say that had he been of them
To kill and quench his thirst had lost their gift
The nobleness of sacrificial honor.

David. I should have done as they did, now I know.

For a time no one speaks. Yacob rises and throws wide the tent flaps. Amplias also rises, takes water from the water jar, and leaning against the tent pole speaks:

Amplias. When one goes wandering in that lesser world—
Why not the greater—which men call the mind,
He has adventures, like all travelers.—

Barabbas. What find you now to mock a noble deed?
(abruptly)

Amplias. While I flew carelessly the kites of thought,
A naughty thief of manners stole away
The gentleness of courtesy. It was
A noble deed, my lad, and fitting well
The honor of a poet and a man.

Yacob. Take you our thanks. I, too, was wandering,
What is this gift which, lacking, man is dead?

Barabbas. One of our rabbis said, "The wine of God."

Amplias. That's worth remembrance; just the thought-
winged phrase
A poet finds in some unequalled hour.

(*Uses his tablets.*)

Yacob. Of all the gifts of God most wonderful,
Ocean or dewdrop, terrible or sweet.

Amplias. Again a thought, for but a moment lost.
(gently, after a pause) If your one God has power infinite,
It follows surely that He may at will
Give to Himself infinity of joy,

And in some isolated wonderment
Supremacy of happiness acquire,
The artist gladness in created things.

Yacob. He saw, and said the world He made was good.

Amplias. I could suggest exceptions.

Yacob. There are none
For one who sees things with the eyes of Christ.

Barabbas. The eyes of Christ—Ah, me, the eyes of Christ!

Amplias regarding him is silent a moment, and then says to Yacob:

Amplias. That which your God called good I do not know.
A rose is beautiful, but is it good?
What has your Christ to do with it? For me
The world is but a very little place
Through which one carries this thing called him-
self.

One travels to escape monotony,
Or memories, or such absurd demands
On purse or heart as vex a man, and sow
With sleepy poppies every garden space
Where bloom the flowers of joy and idleness.
I am to love my neighbor as myself—
Or so my mother taught me. She, I saw,
Is trapped by this philosophy of Christ.
My neighbor! Well, but what becomes of me?

Yacob. I trust, you listened.

Amplias. No, in came a girl,
And then we fled. But now I find again
In one strange phrase my sightless friend let fall
This Christ, of whom in Caesar's palaces
Noble and knight in cautious whispers speak;
Gentle and Jew bend down in prayer to him,
Inheritors of some new hopefulness.

Yacob. And you that love the old and mock the new,
Would you know more of Him who died for man?

Amplias. I said the world was small. Once long ago
When feasting gaily by the Ægean sea,
And we were glad with music, love and wine,
One sober fool cast mid our idle talk
Words of this new revolt against the gods.
A Roman gentleman, a man in years,
Who sought the charm Falernian vineyards bring
To make the minute young, said quietly,
"I have some dim remembrance of the man.
An arrogant, rebellious priesthood asked,
As was the custom at their annual feast,
That I set free one criminal. They chose
A leader of revolt, and so to please
Unruly Jews I sent this Christ to death.
To-day men talk of this Judean serf;
I had quite forgotten it; but now, of late,
I sometimes wonder if—'twas but a chance,
The other man had been the crucified.—
Ho there, my girl, you of the golden hair!
Fill, fill my goblet,"

There was Christ again!

A sudden silence fell upon the feast,
Till one beside me said, "That other man
Had on his side the cheerful God of Luck."

Barabbas. I was that other man.
(rising)

Yacob. What, you! Not you!

Amplias. So cross men's fates. I said the world was small!

Yacob. You were the hero of the priest-led mob!

(to Barabbas) We both are old. I, too, am one of those
Who saw that day of wonder and of fear.

Amplias. I would hear more.

Yacob. Ask of Barabbas then.

Barabbas. And if my heart I open wide to him,
Will he but use for subtleties of talk
The strangest hour the world has ever known?

Amplias. I shall but use it as my reason bids.

Barrabas. I do not know. You took the gift of life
As takes a child some new and fragile toy,
And had no word of thankfulness to God.

Amplias. You had my thanks. What other god save Chance
Had I to thank for that large gift of life?
There is no God. The gods of Greece are dead;
The joy, the beauty and the grace of life
Are gone with them. What now is left to me?
Once as a boy I walked alert to see
Some prick-eared fawn go gaily prancing by,
Or sure I heard Diana's crescent bow
Release wild music from the parting string,
Whence silver arrows hurtled through the wood,
Where tramped with laughter all her buskined
maids.
And white limbed Venus, mistress of delight!
Ah, there's a goddess will outlive all gods!
I found her smiling through a dozen girls.

Barabbas. Fantastic mockeries of love or power,
The puppet fancies of men's poet-dreams.

Amplias. If the gods gave us poets, or they, gods.
Poet and god immortal dreamers were,
And from the faded pages of old books
In days unborn the ghosts of gods will rise
To preach a creed of beauty, love and joy,
And be the comrades of a poet's hour.
One God! you say. No sooner is there one
Than our poor pagan nature finds a need
To personate anew His attributes,
Or so I gather from my mother's talk.

Yacob. The night is with us. I would have my say
In sober morning hours before you leave.

Amplias. I find the midnight hour a wiser friend.
I mock at no man's creed, and least of all
At what beliefs my gentle mother holds.
But since are gone my beautiful dear gods,
I've lost the chasity of virgin faith;
Religion must be beautiful for me
My mother's faith is sorrowful and sad
And has no wings of joy. What else is left?

Yacob. Ah, me, alas! When I was young as you,
Question and answer, all the strife of tongues
Were more to me than honest search for truth.
It may be so with you, I judge you not;
But take with you to that strange world of sleep
From which we bring so very little back,
An old man's words of Him you seem to meet
Or here or there wherever you may stray.
In yonder little town upon the hill
Long years ago a child of God was born.
He taught, as none have taught, the creed of love;
He had but little life. In those few years
He wrought strange wonders, healed men's mortal
ills,
To win the crude belief of simple souls;

Bade others follow him for what he was
And what his wisdom taught to win to him
The more reluctant mind of thoughtful men.
He put aside the Hebrew's dream of power
And, a mute king of truth, accepted death;
But ask Barabbas now how this man died.

Barabbas. I keep no count how many years have gone
Since I have told to any man this tale;
Though I am old, I do not seem to age
More than the sea that is forever young.
When, as Pilatus told, he set me free
To calm the priesthood, they were doubly pleased,
For I had led a weak and vain revolt
Which broke against the Roman's rock of power;
And thus my freedom doomed the silent man
To what I looked for, scourge and crucifix.
Set free! I shudder that it seemed so sweet.
Like to one drowning who sets foot on land,
I drew long breaths of open air and glad
Basked in the sun unseen for many a month,
I was the hero of an hour, and shared
The priesthood's hatred and their scorn of Him
Whose silence was the ransom of my life.
I followed them with thoughts at last set free
From night-long dreams of anguish on the cross
Till clanking fetters woke me to despair.
The man I watched upon his way to death
Bent stumbling 'neath his cross; and then and
there

Some pity for this strange, insulting death
Held me to thought of what I might have been
Had he but made one eloquent appeal.
Why was he silent? He deserved to die.
False to our fathers' creed, he had the power
To lead a host to freedom, and for God
To call to battle all those crouching slaves,
Sweep clean the land from Moab to the sea
And hurl the Roman from his seat of pride!
A king of men! In some uplifting hour
The prophet hand that gave the Maccabee
Victorious visions and a sword of gold
Had won this wasted life to strike and slay.

Barabbas, who had been standing, sinks down exhausted, and all are silent until Amplias speaks.

Amplias. You cannot leave me with this half-told tale.
How died this man of whom while yet he lived
Only Judea knew,—but now, though dead,
Lives like the risen sun with growing power?

Yacob. I too would hear—I did not stay to see
The fading sunset of a noble life.

Barabbas. It is not easily told—

Amplias. Nor lightly heard.

Barabbas rises again feebly and leaning against the tent pole is silent, and at last speaks.

Barabbas. The mocking rabble slowly moved away,
While I in silence lingered, wondering
What secret held this suicidal death.
So rich a life with such calm courage spent,
While I who for my nation boldly dared
Had feared for months the scourging and the
cross.
That I might be where now this brave man hung
Thrilled me at last with strange companionship
In His long torture's awful loneliness.
The guard lay idly round a waning fire,
The stern centurion stood indifferent;

Only the sob of women far away
Came and was lost. A soldier stirred the fire.
Some power of capture in the pleading eyes
Drew me yet nearer till all will was lost;
When that long wail of agonized appeal
Broke on the friendless silence of the night,
My eyes were His to hold—His eyes were mine.
The blood-stained cross shook with the throes of
death;

The black hair heavy with the sweat of death,
Dropped o'er the fallen head, while suddenly
The earth rocked under me. I heard afar
The screams of women and the cries of men,
Uprooted trees, the crash of wall and tower;
And through it ever those beseeching eyes
I saw and fell, and reeling rose again
Blind, blind forever, as my soul had been,
With one last memory of those seeking eyes.

Amplias. (gravely) As strange a story as was ever told!
Why you it plainly cost so much to tell
Chose for the hearing one you pleased to call
A mere light-minded trifler, you may know;
At least you have the gratitude of thanks
From one too apt to hide his graver thought
Beneath a mask, but now would ask of you
What sequel has the tale no man could hear
Without distress for that man and for you.

Barabbas. No, it is not the end. For many a year
Through perils numberless my steps have gone,
The alms of death denied my beggared life.
From land to land a gentle child-like hand,
Or some low voice of warning guided me.
This, this at least, whatever else you doubt,
You cannot dare to question. Everywhere
This tender touch has led me unto men
Who are the servants of this Christ who died.
That hand, unfelt, still leads you near to Him.
My tale is told, and I must wander on.

Yacob. Why not abide with us?

Barabbas. No, I must go.
When that still guiding hand is lost to me,
Then I shall know that I have led to Christ
A soul that brings me to my journey's end;
Ah! then perhaps those eyes of agony
Will smile on me. I have so often tried,
And tried in vain.

Amplias. Take then to sleep my thanks
For something more than merely food and life.

Barabbas. The peace of God be with you all to-night.

Yacob. David, my son, will share with you his tent.
(to Barabbas)
(To Amplias) You will rest here with me, I trust, so long
As you find pleasure in our peaceful life.

The lad returns in haste.

David. Barabbas asks for water—

(*The boy hesitates.*)

Yacob. Now, my son,
Why are you waiting? Take with you what else
Our guest may need for comfort and for rest.

David. The man who came this evening to our tents,
As comes my dog to find me at the fold,
And for two days led here the man who sees—
(*Pauses.*)

Amplias. What else, my lad?

David. (hesitating) He did not seem to know
Which way to go; I led him like a child.
He only said, "Thank God, the eyes are gone!
The eyes are gone!" The man seemed very strange.

Yacob. And was not troubled?

David. No, he bade me say
The hand had left him, and the voice was still!
Yacob stands in thought.

Yacob. Perchance to-morrow he may be again
The man he was this morning. Go, my son.
David leaves him.

MORNING AT DAWN.

Amplias. Yes, I slept soundly, but those eyes he saw
Haunted my dreams. I go away to-day.
Now if your son will set me on the road,
Jerusalem will find me needed gold,
Friends of my people, and some days of rest.
I go just now to say my latest thanks
To this strange messenger with words as strange.
He leaves, and returns in haste much disturbed.

Amplias. Your son is sleeping and I did not wake him.
The man is dead.

Yacob. Dead! Are you sure, my friend?

Amplias. Yes, he is dead. I have seen many die,
But never one who like this stranger seemed
To smile upon me through the face of death.

Yacob. Then he is happy. He has found perhaps
The man his life has sought.

Amplias. Perhaps, perhaps!

BAR HARBOR, August, 1913.



The One Hundred and Ninth Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

By Rebecca H. Whelen



The First Effort, by Albert Laessle

FOR the one hundred and ninth time the Academy of the Fine Arts has opened and closed its doors on an Annual Exhibition of representative American Art.

That this year is an improvement on former ones is a question

that scarcely admits of argument from any viewpoint.

There has been a laudable attempt made by the Academy to strengthen its exhibitions and to raise the standard of the work shown. There are, of course, two ways of doing this,—by the exclusion of inferior pieces, and by the acquisition of finer ones.

The Academy, always conservative, has been so successful in the policy of exclusion that it has raised a storm of protest from would-be exhibitors, but it has undoubtedly done a good thing if this has only resulted in keeping out some illy-executed pictures which have usually found a place on its walls.

Last year there were fewer pictures hung than the year before, while this year there has been a still greater decrease in the number. There are more artists represented this year, however, so although the showing is smaller, it thus becomes more representative.

With regard to the constructive side of the collection, it seems that, among the painters and sculptors of the first rank who used to send three or four pieces every year, but few continue to exhibit, and these are meagerly represented.

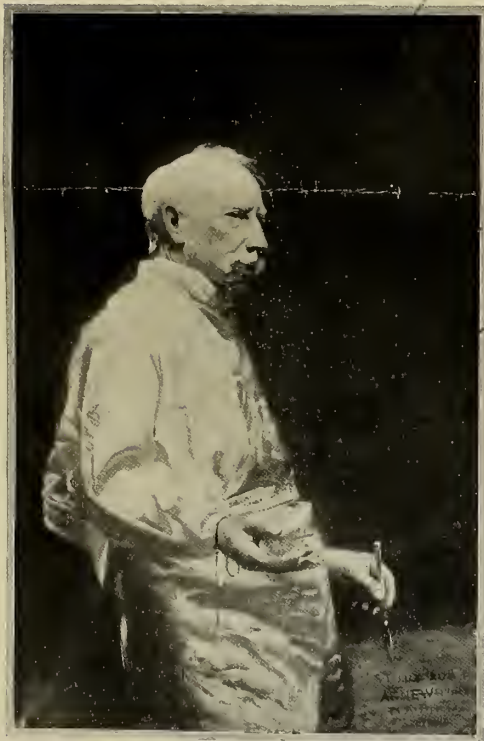
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FOR the one hundred and ninth time the Academy of the Fine Arts has opened and closed its doors on an Annual Exhibition of representative American Art. That this year is an improvement on former ones is a question



The First Effort, by Albert Laeisch

that scarcely admits of argument from any viewpoint. There has been a laudable attempt made by the Academy to strengthen its exhibitions and to raise the standard of the work shown. There are, of course, two ways of doing this,—by the exclusion of inferior pieces, and by the acquisition of finer ones.

The Academy, always conservative, has been so successful in the policy of exclusion that it has raised a storm of protest from would-be exhibitors, but it has undoubtedly done a good thing if this has only resulted in keeping out some ill-executed pictures which have usually found a place on its walls.

Last year there were fewer pictures hung than the year before, while this year there has been a still greater decrease in the number. There are more artists represented this year,





